

If you were to imagine the home of the future, what would it be?

HOW ABOUT:

- Flexible, evolving to meet your family's changing needs, easily adapting to new technologies and life situations.
- Organized, so that plumbing and wiring are easily accessible for repairs and remodeling.
- Sustainable, using advanced building materials that reduce the impact on the environment.

These are some of the basic principles behind the Concept Home, a vision of the home of the future from the Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing (PATH) that's pushing the envelope for the building industry.

"We consulted consumers, builders, manufacturers and architects to determine exactly what is the ideal home," says Carlos Martín of PATH, a program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "That home is affordable, attractive and flexible. It is built with little waste and uses efficient, durable materials. And unlike any other home on the market, it adapts to meet a family's changing needs."

The Home of the



To date, the Concept Home has existed as an architectural-scale model that has toured the country. In 2007, Brighton Construction will build the first demonstration home in Omaha, Neb. — soon to be followed, PATH hopes, by Concept Homes nationwide.



Future

Here today



the PATH Concept Home

Who's Moving: You or the Wall?

Families change. Full nests, empty nests. There's a constant evolution of priorities and needs. Wouldn't it be nice if our homes could evolve, too?

Imagine a home that can easily and affordably adapt to your changing lifestyle. Your cozy kitchen has come to feel too cramped? No problem. In the Concept Home, just move a wall, and you won't have to call three utility companies to make it happen.

Thanks to the flexibility built into the interior walls, rooms can shrink or grow to match your needs. So when you're ready, a "starter home" can expand to become your dream home — or accommodate reduced mobility and other special needs. Moving the wall to make a nursery for a new baby or a first-floor master bedroom for an older couple is no longer a remodeling job of huge proportions.

How does it work?

The utilities in most homes — electrical wires, plumbing, heating ducts, telephone and data lines — are buried behind finished interior walls. If you want to move a wall, you'll probably have to move wiring or pipes, which makes the project difficult and costly.

The PATH Concept Home proposes a different approach: organize the utilities in one, central location rather than in a jumbled mess behind every wall. In this way, interior, non-load-bearing walls can be moved, or removed, far more easily. Suddenly, remodeling enters a whole new realm.

This urban infill home features innovative technologies with clean lines that work well with modern design. The design and technologies incorporated into the home allow for increased flexibility. Some of the innovations include moveable interior partitions or furniture walls, wireless technologies like self-powering light switches, innovative door systems for the powder room, the addition of an elevator in stacked closets, and flexible spaces such as the loft.

As does maintenance

Let's say you want to replace or repair the pipes or duct system. No need to rip through drywall to search for the problem. All your utilities are located in one place, and the central wall contains an access panel that makes these utilities accessible.

So now you can remodel and maintain your home with ease — which is great, because you probably didn't want to move anyway. Besides, it's a far greener option to remodel your existing home than to build a new one, simply because you're recycling the materials.



Single-family Concept Home design, front elevation.

stay dry. When the components are ready, they are shipped to the site, and erected in far less time than for any traditional stick-built home. This is a key concept behind the Concept Home, which ideally can be built, start to finish, in just 20 days.

For the homebuyer, that adds up to a lower cost, higher quality, and more sustainable home — delivered faster than any other home on the market.

You can track the progress of the first Concept Home, and view building plans for a single-family home and an urban townhouse, at www.pathnet.org. 

*By Susan Conbere,
for the PATH Partners*



Single-family Concept Home design, side elevation.

A sustainable house

The Concept Home not only flexes, it uses materials sparingly, cutting building and environmental costs.

If walls, doors, roof trusses and other components were premade in a factory, building crews would lose no time in fitting — and refitting — building components. Standardizing the measurements of major building components would eliminate the guesswork in product selection, just like your kid's building blocks.

Traditional components also require additional cutting that generates waste. Nine-foot pieces of lumber are shipped to the site, and then cut into pieces to make walls, leaving a small mountain of wood behind. Environmentally and economically, it's enormously wasteful. It's also expensive, since the builder has to dispose of that small mountain. Ultimately, you pay the price. Wouldn't it be better if standardized components could be preassembled in the factory and "snapped-in" on the job site, without producing any waste?

Some building components are already made this way. Walls and roofs for manufactured homes (which are homes built with prefabricated components) are made in factories, where materials can be precisely engineered, work can continue in any weather, and building components

Tell PATH what you want in your home. To comment on the two Concept Home designs, complete a brief online survey at www.buildingsurvey.org (and take advantage of a chance to win an Apple iPod Shuffle!). PATH will use your answers to help refine its vision of the ideal home.

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Water Efficiency

100% free irrigation: Rainwater collection system

Energy Efficiency

Big dose of Vitamin D: Beautiful windows and skylights

55% off your electric bills: Solar photovoltaics

65% more off your heating bill: EnergyStar® roofing, geothermal heating

Indoor Environmental Quality

Healthy family: Low toxic paints and stains

Comfy rooms: Radiant floor heating with no drafts

Cozy beds: Organic cotton fabric

Design Innovation

70% less stuff for landfill: Carefully separated and recycled construction waste

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*more at West Coast Green



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